



**Testimony before the Housing Committee in Support of  
S.B. No. 291, AN ACT CONCERNING CERTAIN PROTECTIONS FOR GROUP CHILD CARE  
AND FAMILY CHILD CARE HOMES.**

Senator Lopes, Representative Williams, and members of the Housing Committee, thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of SB 291, An Act Concerning Certain Protections for Group Child Care and Family Child Care Homes.

My name is Merrill Gay and I am the Executive Director of the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, a statewide membership organization committed to ensuring that all children in Connecticut are healthy, safe and ready for lifelong success. The Early Childhood Alliance strongly supports SB 291, which will clarify and extend zoning protections that currently protect family child care homes to include group child care homes as well. The difference between the two is that in a group child care, the owner hires an assistant and also long as the space is sufficient they can serve up to 12 children. This bill would also prevent landlords from prohibiting tenants from running a home child business in their apartment.

Before the pandemic, Connecticut faced a serious shortage of licensed child care. 44% of Connecticut's residents lived in a "child care desert." Those deserts included parts of Bridgeport, Stamford, Danbury and Groton where there is little or no access to quality child care.<sup>1</sup> The shortage of licensed infant toddler care was particularly dire. According to the OEC, the state was short 51,000 infant and toddler child care slots.

Covid disrupted many things but it has really taken a toll on child care. What was in 2019, a simmering problem is now a full blown crisis. Across the state, child care programs are losing staff. As of a couple of weeks ago, there were 1,300 ads on Indeed for child care positions in Connecticut. As one director told me, hardly anyone applies and those that do have no experience or training and are demanding wages higher than I can pay my veteran teachers. Staff shortages have reduced the care capacity of the system and in a recent survey 62% of programs report operating below break even. Without an infusion of support, some or possibly many of those child care centers operating below break even will go bankrupt. Replacing that capacity that will likely be lost, will not be easy.

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<sup>1</sup> Rasheed Malik and Katie Hamm, "Mapping America's Child Care Deserts" (Washington: Center for American Progress, 2017) available at <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/reports/2017/08/30/437988/mapping-americas-child-care-deserts/>.



Child care is not the only industry facing a workforce shortage, but the shortage of child care exacerbates the problem throughout the economy. There are a million fewer women in the workforce nationally than there were prior to the pandemic. Here in Connecticut, the lack of child care is a major barrier to getting parents back into the workforce.

The one bright spot in this picture, and the most likely way to fill the infant toddler care shortage, is family and group home child care. Opening this type of care doesn't require building a new facility, care is offered in the provider's home. These providers, in addition to complying with state licensing regulations that help to ensure safety, offer services that meet the diverse needs of communities across the state. Home-based providers and their intimate, more family-like settings can be particularly great fits for infant/toddler care, and they can offer non-traditional operating hours, linguistically-appropriate care, and importantly, locally accessible care to families who might not have their needs met in a center-based setting. Home-based care settings are an economic driver. Each child care provider enables multiple parents to work.

Licensed child care is critical to the wellbeing of Connecticut's children and families. I will remind you that the alternative is unregulated care. During the the shut down of Care4kids (between March 2016 and November 2017) that drove families to underground care, six children died in illegally operated care. Our state should seize every opportunity to reduce barriers to licensed care and eliminate unregulated child care businesses which cannot be evaluated for safety and quality.

Connecticut has an incredible opportunity to do more to support and encourage licensed family and group child care, and SB 291 is an important step in that process. The bill is supported by the Office of Early Childhood as well as the Governor's Council on Women and Girls.